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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

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Key stories in the media:

Jerusalem Post reported that Deputy State Department Spokesman J. Adam Ereli condemned the double Ashdod bombings in the strongest terms. Leading media reported that the main working assumption among security officials is that the two suicide bombers who carried out the attack made their way from the Gaza Strip into Israel via an underground tunnel. The media reported that IAF helicopters bombed two Gaza City workshops before dawn Monday in response to the attack, and that the inner security cabinet is likely to authorize further military actions. The media reported on various violent incidents in the Gaza Strip Monday, including a missile attack on a bus transporting settlers' children, and today. Warning about a further security bloop, Maariv reported that fuel trucks from Iraq are entering Israel freely at the Arava border crossing with Jordan, following American pressure and against the objection of Israeli security elements.

Ha'aretz reported that Monday PA Chairman Yasser Arafat refused his cabinet's call to use the Palestinian security forces against terrorist organizations, following Sunday's double Ashdod bombings, for which both Fatah and Hamas claimed responsibility.

All media reported (banners in all media, except Ha'aretz) that Tuesday a 10 to 12-year-old Palestinian boy (depending on the media) carrying a bomb that was to be activated by means of a cellular phone, was arrested by the security forces at a roadblock near Nablus. Tanzim activists had sent him with the intention of blowing him up next to IDF soldiers.

Yediot and Ha'aretz reported that the Knesset has received warnings that terrorist organizations are planning to send letter bombs to Israeli public figures.

Jerusalem Post reported that the State Attorney's Office informed the High Court of Justice Monday that the state has decided to re-examine the planned route of a several-kilometer section of the security fence slated to be constructed near the West Bank village of Na'alim just north of Modi'in. The area has been the scene of violent Palestinian anti-fence demonstrations over the last few days. In what it says is a move by thousands of people, Ha'aretz cited unofficial estimates that some 300 Palestinians with Israeli ID cards, who had been living east of the so-called "Jerusalem envelope" fence, are returning to Jerusalem's municipal area every week. They are reportedly driven by the fear of losing social and economic benefits as a result of being cut off from the city.

Maariv reported that the U.S. Administration is checking into, and is likely to take up a proposal from the Prime Minister's Office that it invest funds in building communities and developing industry in the Negev, instead of providing monetary compensation to evacuated settlers. The newspaper quoted a GOI source as saying Monday that this is a winning idea, and that

by adopting it, "the Americans will help Israel move from an age of confrontation to an age of impetus and prosperity. A Maariv headline reads: "Bush Will Make the Negev Bloom."

All media reported that the government survived a no-confidence vote on Sharon's disengagement plan at the Knesset, 46-45.

Jerusalem Post quoted senior PA officials as saying that at least 140 Palestinians have been arrested in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the Intifada on charges of collaborating with Israel.

All media reported that Monday the Knesset paid its respects to the victims of Thursday's Madrid bombings, as the Spanish Ambassador to Israel, Eudaldo Mirapeix, and a EU delegation watched from the gallery. The media quoted Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin (Likud) as saying: "The enemies of humanity have struck again. Exactly two-and-a-half years after the horrific spectacle of September 11, innocent civilians have once again been massacred, and once again the free world has been perceived by its enemies as weak and impotent." Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that the electoral defeat of Spanish PM Jose Maria Aznar's Popular Party has deprived Israel of an "understanding" European government that was attentive to its problems.

Italian FM Franco Frattini, who is due to arrive in Israel on a visit tonight, was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that Israel's security and the fight against terrorism constitute matters of primary importance in the road map. Frattini was also quoted as saying that Italy will not withdraw its forces from Iraq and that there can be no compromise with terrorism. Yediot cited the Italian daily Corriere Della Sera as saying that the Mossad warned Italy that it is one of Al Qaida's next targets. Ha'aretz reported that Israel's political Right is trying to enlist Christian support in Europe -- an equivalent of the kind of support it has found among fundamentalists in the U.S.

Israel Radio reported that Israel could return 40 million shekels (around USD 8.89 million) it confiscated from Palestinian banks in Ramallah last month.

Ha'aretz quoted Seif al-Islam Qadhafi, the son of Libya's leader Muammar Qadhafi, as saying in an interview with the London-based Al-Hayat that his country armed itself with WMD for the purpose of a war with Israel.

Ha'aretz quoted Francis Fukuyama, a former staff member of the U.S. State Department and the author of the 1992 essay "The End of History," as saying Monday at Tel Aviv University, among a panel that included Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Labor Party Shimon Peres, that the struggle against terrorism is not a conflict between civilizations. Fukuyama claimed at the meeting that fanatical Islam -- "the periphery of history" -- has a fateful influence on "the center," i.e. the West.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "It is not inconceivable that Ariel Sharon might ultimately have to forget his grand plan.... By so doing he will neutralize most of the opposition and will crush the rebellion in the Likud before its inception."

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "Sharon's unilateral disengagement has long been bilateral. The Palestinians decided 30 years ago to take any shred of land that falls into their hands."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: "Sharon has gone too far to assume that he is kidding around with his people, America and our potential allies in Europe, now waking up to the grim reality of mega-terrorism. Until proven otherwise, there is no reason not to take him seriously."

Former minister of foreign affairs and former minister of defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz: "As summer approaches and the American election campaign heats up,

it is not likely that the U.S. Administration will endorse Sharon's plan.... In the meantime, pursue the war against terrorism and don't bother the President."

Block Quotes:

I. "Lots of Trouble"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (March 16): "It is not inconceivable that Ariel Sharon might ultimately have to forget his grand plan, quash the medium-sized one and go for the small version: a partial withdrawal from Gaza, keeping the three northern settlements intact, the fate of Philadelphia [the corridor at the Gaza-Egypt border] unclear. By so doing he will neutralize most of the opposition and will crush the rebellion in the Likud before its inception.... Ariel Sharon is in trouble. If he opts for the grand plan he will lose his coalition, perhaps even his party, and maybe even his seat as prime minister. Binyamin Netanyahu is in trouble. If he acts against Sharon, he will be gambling on his political future and will lose public points. If he doesn't, the same applies. The two of them, Sharon and Netanyahu, are trapped. They are both searching for a dignified way out. Bibi [Netanyahu] has spoken in the past number of days staunchly against the disengagement plan. Sharon has tried to speak in its favor, but without success.... The way things look now, the wind in Sharon's sails is slowly dying out. His principled determination still exists, but life looks more complicated than ever before. The Israelis made it clear to the Americans that in any event, no steps would be taken on the ground before the summer of 2005. Sharon won't be going to Washington this month, but only next month (maybe). The Americans are looking forward to the Arab League convening at the end of this month and to an explicit condemnation of suicide bombing attacks, and don't want to ruin that achievement."

II. "Sharon's Disengagement Has Long Been Bilateral"

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (March 16): "Arafat's court does not want Sharon's court spoiling its victory celebration. They are keeping one important fact under wraps: Sharon's unilateral disengagement has long been bilateral. The Palestinians decided 30 years ago to take any shred of land that falls into their hands.... That decision, which involves the liberation of all Palestinian lands and the annihilation of Israel, is known as 'the plan of the stages.' In 1988, it made way for the Algiers Declaration, which recognized Security Council Resolution 242 requiring Israeli withdrawal only from territory conquered during the Six-Day War. In the Oslo accords, the PLO agreed to receive the territories in stages.... The fact that the PLO leadership is not wiping away a tear at Israel's departure from Gaza in exchange for nothing does not keep it from going around the world with downcast demeanor. Why would they miss the opportunity to present Israel as the party that buried the road map under the outposts of Israeli trespassers in the West Bank and the ruins of the homes of innocent Palestinians in Gaza?"

III. "Take Him Seriously"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (March 16): "The first thing on [Sharon's] list is to win the consent and support of President Bush. Sharon is obsessive about coordinating every step of the way with him. Next comes working out the operation in detail, preferably with the approval of the Strip's 7,500 settlers. From start to finish, the pullback should be wrapped up in a year or two. While this is happening, Sharon will drum up political support for the move.... But Sharon is the one who will choose the timing.... Sharon has gone too far to assume that he is kidding around with his people, America and our potential allies in Europe, now waking up to the grim reality of mega-terrorism. Until proven otherwise, there is no reason not to take him seriously."

IV. "Don't Bother the President Now"

Former minister of foreign affairs and former minister of defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz (March 16): "For now, it does not look like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be one of the prominent issues in the [U.S. presidential] election. So what does ... it have to do with Sharon's plans for unilateral disengagement in Gaza and the uprooting of Israeli settlements? Not much really, unless the execution of this plan ends up

in an escalation of violence in the area that blows up in Bush's face, highlighting another problem that his rival can accuse him of having created. Bush probably prefers to leave the issue well enough alone. But that's not the way the Prime Minister's Office sees it.... As summer approaches and the American election campaign heats up, it is not likely that the U.S. Administration will endorse Sharon's plan. Everything is going to have to be put on hold until after November. And by then, everything may look different - in Israel, in the United States, and maybe even among the Palestinians. In the meantime, pursue the war against terrorism and don't bother the President."

12. Campaign Against Terrorism:

Summary:

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Europe is not prepared yet to face the difficult, pan-human reality of non-state-based Islamic terror, which seeks to acquire weapons of mass destruction."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If terrorist groups believe they can alter the outcome of Spain's election, why not attempt to alter the outcome of America's?"

Block Quotes:

1I. "Comfort Now"

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 16): "Europe is not prepared yet to face the difficult, pan-human reality of non-state-based Islamic terror, which seeks to acquire weapons of mass destruction. It suffers from myopia because the politicians there are trying to woo the Moslem voters who have flooded many of their countries; and because the shifting feelings of superiority and inferiority about the U.S. plays a key role in undermining the recognition of America's role in defending the values of the West; and mainly because the peoples and governments on the old continent are focused on comfort now, and not on any real sacrifice for the sake of a better future later. Al Qaida, Hizbullah and radical Islam do not aspire to achieve a compromise. They want to regain control over Andalusia in Spain, and not only to punish it for sending 1,400 troops to Iraq. They have succeeded in deceiving the voters in Madrid and Barcelona, as if their objectives were restricted and all the voters needed to do was to oust from power a government that helped Bush against an awful tyrant like Saddam Hussein. Israel was first, but is not alone.... If Madrid still refuses to understand the significance of the events, the Jewish state has no choice."

II. "Spanish Democracy"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 16): "The Al-Qaida manifesto [released after the Madrid bombings] spoke menacingly of a 'Winds of Black Death' operation against the U.S., which it said was 90 percent complete. This may or may not be a bluff. What's certain is that if terrorist groups believe they can alter the outcome of Spain's election, why not attempt to alter the outcome of America's? In the immediate aftermath of Thursday's bombing, the first question on everyone's mind was 'Who did it?' Then the question became 'Why?' If people in democratic nations persuade themselves that the answer is the war in Iraq -- and, more broadly, the American-led war on terror -- they will have handed al-Qaida the very thing it seeks."

13. Greater Middle East Initiative:

Summary:

Moderate Israeli Arab Dr. Thabet Abu-Ras, a U.S. university graduate, wrote in the weekly Arabic-language Assennara: "American democracy might be good for the American people but duplicating and implementing it in the Middle East is not suitable to the nations [of the region]."

Block Quotes:

"Democracy and the Arab Nations"

Moderate Israeli Arab Dr. Thabet Abu-Ras, a U.S. university graduate, wrote in the weekly Arabic-language Assennara (March 12): "Arab intellectuals, politicians and academics kept silent until the U.S. President reminded them of the need to democratize Arab and Islamic nations.... This 'peaceful' project [the Greater Middle East Initiative] is another component of the American globalization system with its ultimate goal: economic domination of the region.... Who stood against the liberation movements in the Arab world for the last fifty years? It was the successive American administrations.... Which democracy is President Bush preparing for us [Arabs]? An American-style democracy.... American democracy might be good for the American people but duplicating and implementing it in the Middle East is not suitable to the nations [of the region].... It [the American model of democracy] ignores the cultural and educational aspects of the Arab and Islamic nations. There is a debate about the credibility and seriousness of the U.S. Administration as well. How would the U.S. administrations welcome the results of this democracy if it conflicts with the U.S. economic and political interests in the region? It has been proved that the Americans are looking for a special type of democracy, which brings 'acceptable' leaderships to power.... We have the right to be suspicious of the intentions of those who bent democracies and supported dictatorships in Africa, Asia and Latin America.... However, it is the time to propose our [the Arabs'] perception on democracy.... Our people need freedom, human rights, and democracy, but refuse to import the American model."

KURTZER